

Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP)

Where can you get emergency contraceptive pills?

Emergency contraception may require a prescription from a qualified health care provider. In Washington State many participating pharmacists can provide ECP directly, without prescription. Call the emergency contraception national toll-free line (1-888-NOT-2-LATE) for your local ECP provider. You can also call your local family planning clinic for information.

How emergency contraception works:

Emergency contraceptive pills are used AFTER sexual intercourse. If you aren't using birth control, or if the condom breaks, or you are late getting your birth control shot, or have missed your pills, not used your patch or vaginal ring correctly or have had sex against your will, ECP may stop you from getting pregnant.

The main way that ECP works is to stop your body from releasing an egg, so no egg is present to be fertilized; ECP also caused the cervical mucus (the liquid at the opening of the uterus) to thicken, which can stop sperm from getting into the uterus. ECP may also cause the lining in the uterus to change, preventing implantation.

These pills MUST be taken as directed by the doctor or health provider or pharmacist, as soon as possible after unprotected sex. Emergency contraception may prevent pregnancy but it will NOT stop or harm an already-established pregnancy. ECP does not cause abortion.

How to use emergency contraceptive pills:



Swallow the first dose no later than 72 hours after unprotected sex. Swallow the second dose 12 hours after the first dose. If given a

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prescription of anti-nausea medication, take it 1 hour before your first ECP dose.*

If your period does not start within 3 weeks, see your doctor or health provider for an exam and a pregnancy test. Do not have unprotected sex in the days or weeks following your ECP treatment.

Effectiveness:

Effectiveness rates for ECP are different from other birth control methods because the effectiveness rate is based on a 1-time use. Studies show a range of effectiveness, depending on how soon after sex ECP is taken. If ECP is taken within 72 hours after sexual intercourse, the risk of pregnancy is reduced by at least 75%; instead of 8 in 100 women getting pregnant without ECP, fewer than 2 out of 100 will get pregnant. "Plan B" brand progestin-only ECP is even more effective.

ECPs are not recommended for routine use because they are less effective than regular contraceptives.

*Do not have unprotected sex in the days or weeks following your ECP treatment; use condoms until you get your period and/or use another birth control method.

Benefits of ECP:

Emergency contraceptive pills are available if you aren't using birth control at the time of sexual intercourse, or if:

- the condom (male or female) slips, breaks or leaks.
- your diaphragm or cervical cap was inserted incorrectly or removed too early.
- you missed your birth control pills.
- you used any other birth control method incorrectly.
- you were exposed to some medicines, drugs or other toxic agents (which can reduce the effectiveness of some methods).
- you had sex against your will.

Potential side effects:

The most commonly reported side effects are nausea and for a few women, vomiting. Medication for these side effects can be given by your doctor or health care provider. Progestin-only ECP ("Plan B") causes less nausea. Other possible complaints could be fatigue, breast tenderness, headache, abdominal pain and dizziness. ECP may change the amount, duration, and timing of the next menstrual period.

Potential risks:

There are no known health risks. ECP does not harm an existing pregnancy. Pregnancy may still occur, including ectopic pregnancy.